NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-0389 MARCH 18, 1976
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MOSCOW'S MILITARY EFFORT AND THE SOVIET ECONOMY

ANNCR:

THROUGH A MAJOR EFFORT OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS THE SOVIET UNION TODAY IS A SUPERPOWER WHICH HAS REACHED ROUGH MILITARY EQUIVALENCE WITH THE UNITED STATES. THIS GOAL WAS ACHIEVED THROUGH MASSIVE CONCENTRATION OF RESOURCES FOR THE MILITARY AND AT THE EXPENSE OF THE CIVILIAN ECONOMY. VOA NEWS ANALYST JOHN ALBERT HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS:

VOICE:

IN RECOGNIZING THE MILITARY STATUS OF THE SOVIET UNION TODAY AND THE APPARENT INTENTION OF THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP TO CONTINUE ITS VAST ARMAMENT EFFORT, ONE SHOULD NOT OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT SOVIET POWER HAS DEVELOPED UNEVENLY. THE ASSISTANT U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS, ARTHUR HARTMAN, OBSERVED IN A RECENT SPEECH THAT THE SOVIET'S NEW MILITARY STATUS "SHOULD NOT OBSCURE IN OUR OWN MINDS THE MANY PROBLEMS THEY STILL FACE." "THE SOVIET COMMITMENT TO DEFENSE PRIORITIES," HE ADDED, "HAS EXPOSED AND EXACERBATED THE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES WHICH HAVE DOGGED THEM EVER SINCE THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION." AS EXAMPLES OF THESE DIFFICULTIES, MISTER HARTMAN CITED LOW PRODUCTIVITY IN SOVIET AGRICULTURE, THE NEGLECT OF THE CONSUMER SECTOR, AND A GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT HALF THAT OF THE UNITED STATES, FOR A MUCH GREATER POPULATION.

WESTERN OBSERVERS HAVE OFTEN RAISED THE QUESTION OF HOW THE SOVIET UNION WAS ABLE TO BUILD A FORMIDABLE

MILITARY MACHINE WHILE THEIR CIVILIAN ECONOMY REMAINS HIGHLY INEFFICIENT AND WASTEFUL. TWO ASTUTE WESTERN OBSERVERS, THE FORMER MOSCOW CORRESPONDENTS OF THE "NEW YORK TIMES" AND THE "WASHINGTON POST," HEDRICK SMITH AND ROBERT KAISER, IN THEIR RECENT BOOKS ON THE SOVIET UNION OFFER THIS EXPLANATION. THE MILITARY ECONOMY, THEY WRITE, IS NOT APART FROM THE REST; IT IS THE CREAM ON TOP OF THE REST.

THE MILITARY ECONOMY GETS THE MOST RESOURCES AND MAKES THE BEST PRODUCTS. TO A GREAT EXTENT MILITARY EQUIPMENT IS PRODUCED IN THE SAME FACTORIES THAT PRODUCE GOODS FOR THE CIVILIAN ECONOMY. BUT THROUGH A RIGID SYSTEM OF QUALITY CONTROL, ENFORCED BY THE MILITARY, THEIR EQUIPMENT IS VASTLY SUPERIOR. IN EFFECT, SAYS MISTER KAISER, "THE CIVILIAN ECONOMY SUBSIDIZES MILITARY PRODUCTION BY DEVOTING AN EXTRAORDINARY PORTION OF ITS ENERGY AND RESOURCES TO MILITARY NEEDS." OR, AS HIS COLLEAGUE, HEDRICK SMITH PUTS IT, UNLIKE THE WEST, SOVIET MILITARY TECHNOLOGY IS NOT CLOSELY RELATED TO THE GENERAL LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE ENTIRE ECONOMY. FOR THE SOVIET MILITARY HE SAYS, NO EFFORT OR LUXURY WILL BE SPARED, "THOUGH ORDINARY RUSSIANS HAVE TO TIGHTEN THEIR BELTS TO PAY FOR IT."

NOT ONLY DOES THE SOVIET MILITARY RECEIVE ABSOLUTE PRIORITY. IT ALSO ABSORBS A MUCH HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF THE GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT ... APPROXIMATELY FIFTEEN PERCENT VERSUS ABOUT SIX PERCENT IN THE UNITED STATES. THE ECONOMIC STRAIN IMPOSED BY SOVIET MILITARY EXPENDITURES

IS EVIDENT IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT OUTPUT BETWEEN CIVIL AND MILITARY USES.

ASIDE FROM A SMALL GROUP OF SOVIET OFFICIALS, NO ONE KNOWS HOW MANY CIVILIANS ARE ENGAGED IN PRODUCING THE GOODS AND PROVIDING THE SERVICES CONSUMED BY THE SOVIET MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. THE "AIR FORCE MAGAZINE" ESTIMATES THE NUMBER AT FIFTEEN MILLION, WITH EIGHT MILLION DIRECTLY EMPLOYED IN PRODUCING THE WEAPON SYSTEMS AND THE HARDWARE FOR THE SPACE PROGRAM. THE SAME MAGAZINE POINTS OUT THAT THE HIGH PROPORTION OF NATIONAL RESOURCES DEVOTED TO THE MILITARY IS ONE OF THE CAUSES OF THE ACUTE HOUSING SHORTAGE.

THE MAGAZINE CONCLUDES THAT THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COSTS TO THE USSR OF SIMULTANEOUSLY ASPPIRING FOR MILITARY SUPERIORITY OVER THE U.S. AND NATO WHILE TRYING TO SURPASS THE U.S. ECONOMICALLY ARE VERY GREAT. "ONLY BELEAGURED LITTLE ISRAEL," SAYS THE ARTICLE, "SPENDS MORE OF ITS GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT ON THE MILITARY AND DEMANDS MORE SOCIAL SACRIFICE FROM ITS CITIZENS IN THE NAME OF THE COMMON DEFENSE." THE 25TH SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS CERTAINLY HAS SHOWN THAT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP REMAINS COMMITTED FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS TO THE SAME PRIORITIES FOR THE MILITARY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE CIVILIAN ECONOMY.

JS/PBM